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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 000439

NSC FOR MICHELE GAVIN AND EMILY HUIE
LIBREVILLE PLS PASS TO AF/PDAS CARTER
AF FOR BEYZEROV
PARIS FOR KANEDA
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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: TIME TO RE-ENGAGE WITH THE FRENCH?

REF: ANTANANARIVO 428

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 D AND E

11. (C) Summary: This is an action message for AF and possibly Embassy Paris (see para 7). With AU/UN/Francophonie-mediated negotiations here all but collapsed (reftel), the International Contact Group for Madagascar (ICG) -- which includes the USG -- should now regroup and consider alternate strategies. As this happens, there is an acute and rising concern here, which we share, that the French are leading an effort to abandon the mediation in favor of a less-than-consensual move into early elections; in our view, this approach will fail to resolve the crisis. The Francophonie (OIF) and AU are leading this charge, inspired by "new ideas," probably based on new instructions from Paris. While the French here are being entirely mum, the UN mediator (strictly protect) is telling me that Elysee Secretary General Claude Gueant is now calling the shots on Madagascar, guided by "Francafrique" stalwart Robert Bourgis -- and sidelining the Elysee tandem of Joubert and Marechaux. French efforts to broker introductory meetings for TGV with other heads of state on the sidelines of the Bongo funeral have failed, and TGV has cancelled plans to go there; however, the fact that France was making these arrangements at all, after reportedly having also played the intermediary for his recent visits with Wade and Qaddhafi, is seen here as evidence of their engagement against the stated policy of the AU, UN, EU, US -- and themselves. The UN mediator is seeking to get more engagement from the UK and Germany, as counterweights to the French role, and will also seek to engage the UNSYG more directly in these efforts. We recommend that AF weigh in with Paris to caution against abandoning the mediation in favor of a less-than-consensual approach by the HAT, that could backfire. End Summary.

12. (C) As foreseen in reftel, political negotiations here all but collapsed over the weekend with the refusal of the HAT to consider a demand for a broad amnesty demanded by former President Ratsiraka. TGV has instructed his delegation to withdraw, and Ravalomanana has also given instructions to block and disrupt. The idea now in the air -- apparently supported by the HAT and some others -- is to say, "we tried negotiations; now let's move directly to elections by the end of 2009." According to UN mediator Tiebile Drame, a campaign is being organized to blame the collapse on the international mediators, asking publicly "how can the international community object to the early elections

they have been demanding all along?" The problem is that the organization of those elections by the HAT, even if accompanied by a small coterie of splinter factions and defectors from the other political movements, would not be consensual, and almost certainly would provoke a boycott, or worse, by political forces outside that process. They would therefore not resolve the crisis at all. We and the UN have warned the HAT and others that non-consensual elections would not be supported by the international community and must be avoided in favor of continuing what admittedly are difficult negotiations.

13. (C) While clear proof lacks, it appears that the French back -- and probably are behind -- this new approach. Drame (protect) believes that Elysee Secretary General Claude Gueant, working with Francafrigue stalwart Robert Bourgis (who recently visited Antananarivo), is now calling French shots on Madagascar. They apparently have supplanted Elysee advisors Bruno Joubert and Remy Marechaux, and perhaps even Diplomatic Advisor Jean-David Levitte. Bourgis is known as the quintessential Francafrigue player, deeply steeped in intrigues elsewhere in Africa and connected to French networks throughout the region. TGV was supposed to leave yesterday for Bongo's funeral, where the French reportedly had worked out appointments with a number of African heads of state, according to Drame. However, Ravalomanana apparently derailed this process with his own active diplomacy, and Ambassador Jean-Marc Chataigner here advised TGV Sunday that the trip was off. Drame is convinced that France previously organized TGV's trips to see Wade in Dakar and Qaddhafi in Libya. Their goal is to make eventual recognition of the HAT as palatable as possible through a series of high-level encounters inferring legitimacy.

14. (C) Chataigner expressed his view several months ago that resolution of the Malagasy political impasse by June 26 was critical. June 26 is now around the corner, and at Friday's ICG meeting his deputy pressed the parties for a "target date" for signature of the "Charter for the Transition," now under discussion since mid-April. While most ambassadors are already saying -- as I am -- that they will not attend or be represented at the June 26 celebration, speculation is rife that the French (who are saying nothing on this issue) plan to attend. They appear to be looking hard for a pretext for recognition before then, which would make them the first to recognize the HAT; they are still smarting from having been preceded in recognition in 2002 by the Swiss and Americans. This also would allow their unaccredited ambassador finally to present his letters, and allow them to move back to the business-as-usual approach they so clearly desire. The way they intend to do this, according to Drame, is to move the HAT quickly toward elections, truly consensual or not; once on that path, recognition will become possible. Already, Drame reported, the HAT has asked the Elysee directly for five million Euros to support those elections, in which they would be accompanied by an assortment of splinter groups and defectors who would be characterized as providing the necessary consensus.

15. (C) Drame is working hard within the AU/UN/OIF mediation team to come up with another approach, to steer them back to the negotiating table and away from non-consensual elections. The ICG is likely to be convened later this week to discuss the options. Drame is strongly opposed to rushing forward with non-consensual elections, but he is concerned that AU mediator Ablasse Ouedraogo and OIF Envoy Edem Kodjo seem to have turned that page. Drame favors continuing with the negotiation among the four Malagasy political "families," solving the current impasse over Ratsiraka's excessive amnesty demands by placing the issue within the charter and leaving much of it for later resolution. He has no direct indication where Ouedraogo and Kodjo got their "new idea," but strongly suspects, as we do, that it was made in Paris.

16. (C) The next step in the negotiation process may be a formal suspension declared by the mediators; Drame drafted a press communique to that effect one week ago, but Ouedraogo

refused to approve it, while instead pushing forward with talks that proved fruitless. Kodjo, who returned Friday, now agrees with Drame that the talks are dead and should be suspended, so such a declaration is likely now imminent. The formal suspension would serve notice to the Malagasy that they need to face their own responsibilities in this matter, while also allowing the mediators a reprieve to visit SADC members in southern Africa, and meet directly with Ravalomanana in Johannesburg to seek better cooperation (and more helpful statements and instructions) on his part. In particular, Drame wants Ravalomanana to agree not to run in the next presidential election, a commitment that would make Rajoelina far less likely to run himself. Drame's view is that the King of Swaziland remains a problem, as he has not changed his view on the need for Ravalomanana to return to run the country, and continues to wield influence as chair of the SADC Troika. Drame, like us, has no read-out on the meeting in Capetown one week ago of Zuma and Mswati; press reports also suggest that Ravalomanana met with them both there. In sum, the SADC position remains an unhelpful outlier, reinforced by last week's feckless COMESA statement also probably engineered by Ravalomanana.

17. (C) Action Request: In view of the above, we recommend communication with the French -- in Paris, on the margins of the Bongo funeral in Libreville, or by phone from Washington

-- to make the following points to appropriate French interlocutors:

-- The USG remains concerned about the lack of a political settlement in Madagascar, and continues to believe that a consensual resolution through negotiations is the only way forward.

-- While the negotiations are proving difficult and time-consuming, we continue to support the AU and UN in their efforts to craft a "Transition Charter" that would lead consensually to elections as soon as possible.

-- As much as we want early elections, we would caution against accepting anything less than a credibly consensual way forward; it would be a mistake to abandon the negotiation in favor of a hasty, less-than-consensual path toward elections.

-- For the USG, eventual recognition of a legitimate government in Madagascar will depend on credible elections.

-- If the preparation of elections is consensual, neutral and inclusive, the USG plans to support those election preparations politically and financially.

MARQUARDT